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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000313

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SUBJECT: MAURITANIANS REPATRIATED FROM SENEGAL SURPASS
10,000

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: The cumulative number of Mauritanian refugees repatriated from Senegal surpassed 10,000 people in April. There are approximately 10,000 more refugees that remain in Senegal that have expressed their intent to return to Mauritania. To date, all of the refugees have returned to the Brakna and Trarza regions. UNHCR expects to conduct future convoys to the Gorgol, Guidimaka and Assaba regions. UNHCR has changed implementing partners, replacing local NGO ALPD with the German development agency (GTZ) and Italian NGO Intersos. This change has significantly improved UNHCR's ability to provide services to the returnees. Many challenges remain, including access to water, education, healthcare and sanitation. The vast majority of returnees still have not received their national identity cards, limiting their mobility. UNHCR continues to work on this issue and believes that progress is being made. UNHCR will end its formal repatriation program June 30, but will remain in Mauritania at least through the end of 2009 to provide support and reintegration assistance to the returnees. End Summary.

RETURNEES SURPASS 10,000

¶2. (SBU) UNHCR Senegal has received over 20,000 voluntary repatriation forms (VRF) from Mauritians living in Senegal indicating their intention to return to Mauritania. To date, a total of 12,359 VRFs have been approved by Mauritanian authorities. Many of the VRFs that have been submitted to Mauritanian authorities have yet to be approved. UNHCR Mauritania representative Anne-Marie Deutschlander-Roggia said that some of the VRFs had gone missing, although it was unclear where in the chain of custody they had been lost. Of the 353 VRFs that have been rejected to date, most were rejected due to incomplete information. Deutschlander-Roggia said that she is pushing to set a deadline for the Ministry of Interior to approve the remaining VRFs so that UNHCR can complete the repatriation. The number of Mauritanian refugees returning from Senegal surpassed 10,000 people after the most recent convoy April 23. Since the repatriation began in January 2008, all of the refugees have returned to the Brakna (7596 people) and Trarza (2603 people) regions in southwestern Mauritania.

¶3. (U) UNHCR is prepared to repatriate refugees to the Gorgol, Guidimaka and Assaba regions, but Deutschlander-Roggia stated that UNHCR still "needs refugees." In most cases, the VRFs have been approved for all but one or two members of the village that intend to return to these regions. The villagers are insisting on waiting until the whole village can be repatriated together. Deutschlander-Roggia said that UNHCR is working to clear these last few VRFs so that UNHCR can proceed with

repatriations to these regions. She noted her frustration that refugees were telling UNHCR when they would be repatriated instead of the other way around. She added that many people slated to return to the Gorgol area are well-established in Senegal and she questioned how many people really intended to return. Because of the smaller than predicted number of refugees now anticipated to return to the Gorgol, UNHCR has closed its office in Kaedi (Gorgol) and moved its operations to its regional office in Boghe (Brakna). There are also questions regarding what to do with the approximately 1700 refugees that stated that they want to return to Nouakchott. Mauritanian authorities question how many of them actually came from Nouakchott. It is unlikely that many of the refugees were actually born in Nouakchott, even if they were living there when they were forced to flee to Senegal. Deutschlander-Roggia said that the refugees returning to urban areas may be required to at least pass through their native villages, or the village where their parents were born, before continuing on to Nouakchott.

NEW IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

14. (C) UNHCR Mauritania has replaced local NGO ALPD with the German development agency (GTZ) and Italian NGO Intersos as its implementing partners. In a courtesy call with Ambassador soon after her arrival in August 2008, Deutschlander-Roggia said that she was not satisfied with ALPD as the implementing partner and was looking to replace it with a partner with greater capacity. Comment: It was clear from the beginning of the repatriation that ALPD did

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not have the necessary capacity to carry out the work required of it by UNHCR. Much of the work that it was supposed to do was not being carried out in a timely fashion and there were questions about mismanagement. Unfortunately, UNHCR continued to rely on ALPD in spite of the widely acknowledged problems for many months. It was only when Deutschlander-Roggia arrived in Mauritania that UNHCR took action to finally find a new implementing partner. End comment. Deutschlander-Roggia stated that she was very pleased so far with the GTZ and Intersos. UNHCR also signed an agreement with local NGO AMDH, a well-respected human rights organization. AMDH will be in charge of implementing protection monitoring activities in returnee areas.

NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION CARDS

15. (SBU) As of March 2009, UNHCR reports that less than 200 national identity cards had been delivered to the nearly 10,000 returnees. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (GIRM) has made better progress on birth certificates, delivering over 2000 to date. UNHCR's figures on national identity cards differ significantly from the GIRM's, which claims that 1360 identity cards have been issued. The difference may be in part semantic. While the GIRM may have issued 1360 cards, they may be sitting with local authorities who have not yet actually delivered them to the individual returnees. The national identity cards are extremely important for the returnees because without them, they have difficulty traveling internally and cannot pass police checkpoints.

16. (C) While the vast majority of refugees still have not obtained civil documents, Deutschlander-Roggia said that she thought the situation had finally been taken care of. She has been meeting regularly with Ministry of Interior officials to work on the issue. She said that she has been very direct with the officials, telling them that if they do not issue the identity cards in a timely manner, UNHCR could pull out of the repatriation operation and then the operation will fail. She said her blunt statements seemed to get their

attention and she believes that progress is being made on the situation.

HOUSING

17. (U) UNHCR has stopped providing permanent housing to the refugees and has begun providing them with the materials to construct semi-permanent shelters. The small concrete block houses that UNHCR began building for the first returnees were problematic from the beginning. The returnees did not like the houses, complaining that they were inappropriate for multi-generation families and were not suitable for the climate. They were also very expensive to build. As the returnees tended to be disproportionately women, children and old men, there was not enough labor to build the houses. UNHCR began relying on ALPD to build the houses when the returnees were either unable or unwilling to build them themselves, leaving many returnees in UNHCR-provided tents for months. UNHCR has since switched to providing materials to the returnees to build their own semi-permanent shelters with assistance from the implementing partners. The shelters consist of a concrete base, a concrete block wall about three feet high with a metal screen on top, and a corrugated metal roof. The semi-permanent shelters give the returnees more room and are more appropriate for Mauritania's desert climate. They are also less expensive and can be built much faster.

WATER

18. (U) In the Trarza region, all of the returnee sites have permanent water sources. The situation in the Brakna region is more precarious as eleven sites still do not have permanent access to water. UNHCR continues to deliver water to these sites by truck, making up to five deliveries to each site per day. Work is already underway at several of the sites to dig wells and build water towers. Intersos has provided donkey carts for other sites to be able to bring water in from neighboring villages that already have hydraulic installations. UNHCR is heavily burdened by the continued need to deliver water by truck to eleven different sites. UNHCR Mauritania only has 12 trucks, only five of which are currently working (it is awaiting the delivery of

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replacement parts in order to repair the other seven trucks). The small number of working trucks and continuing need to deliver water are hampering UNHCR's ability to conduct repatriations.

HEALTH, NUTRITION AND EDUCATION

19. (U) The GIRM has been doing regular nutritional screenings and providing nutritional supplements at returnee sites. The GIRM's latest survey from March 2009 shows that approximately 10% of returnee children suffer from malnutrition. Intersos continues to deliver food provided by WFP to returnee sites. A government-run mobile health unit visits the various returnee sites on a monthly basis to provide free consultations and treatments. However, most of the sites still do not have any clinics or healthcare providers. In urgent situations, the returnees must travel to the nearest town to obtain care. Sanitation remains a problem at many of the sites. UNHCR recently ordered 2,041 kits to construct latrines to address the situation. At several sites, none of the children are attending school. Part of the problem is raising awareness among parents about the need to send their children to school, but efforts are hampered by a lack of classrooms and teachers. UNHCR continues to work with the national refugee agency ANAIR and the National Office of

Education to find solutions.

POLITICAL WILL FOR THE REPATRIATION

¶10. (C) Deutschlander-Roggia says that she believes the GIRM really does want the repatriation to succeed and is committed to it, in spite of the coup. She stated that while the GIRM often did not move as fast as she would prefer, she was still receiving good cooperation in the field. She said that she was not sure where ANAIR was getting its financing from. The GIRM had originally made an appeal to donors for \$62 million in early 2008 to finance programs to reintegrate the returnees, but it is unclear how much it has actually received to date. Deutschlander-Roggia made clear that UNHCR had no intention of providing financing to ANAIR. To date, ANAIR's activities remain fairly modest, limited to distribution of livestock to some families and providing vocational training. There have not been any medium or large scale development activities designed to benefit the entire community. While almost all families have received land titles to build their houses, the issue of large pieces of land for cultivation has not yet been resolved. Deutschlander-Roggia reiterated that anytime UNHCR runs into trouble with GIRM authorities, she reminds them that if they do not take certain actions, the repatriation program will fail. She noted that this has been a very effective method for her.

End of Repatriation

¶11. (U) UNHCR has set a firm date of June 30 for the end of the formal repatriation program. UNHCR will likely remain in country through the end of the year providing support services to the returnees. Deutschlander-Roggia said that she is still trying to figure out exactly what type of support UNHCR will provide to returnees who decide to come back on their own after the formal repatriation program ends. She said that she did not want to punish returnees for coming back on their own. However, it would be a logistical nightmare for UNHCR to try to identify and locate individual families returning to different sites and to provide them with the same services that the returnees participating in the formal repatriation received.

HANKINS